

VZCZCXRO3047  
PP RUEHAG RUEHBC RUEHDE RUEHKUK RUEHROV  
DE RUEHLB #1349/01 2591423  
ZNY SSSSS ZZH  
P 151423Z SEP 08  
FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 3037  
INFO RUEHEE/ARAB LEAGUE COLLECTIVE  
RUCNMEM/EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE  
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 2908  
RUEHNO/USMISSION USNATO 3122  
RHMFISS/CDR USCENCOM MACDILL AFB FL  
RHEHAAA/NSC WASHDC

S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 03 BEIRUT 001349

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR NEA/FO, NEA/ELA  
ALSO FOR IO ACTING A/S HOOK AND PDAS WARLICK  
USUN FOR KHALILZAD/WOLFF/SCHEDLBAUER  
NSC FOR ABRAMS/RAMCHAND/YERGER/MCDERMOTT

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/15/2018

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [UNSC](#) [IS](#) [SY](#) [LE](#)

SUBJECT: LEBANON: SAAD HARIRI GRATEFUL FOR U.S. SUPPORT,  
WILL LIKELY MEET NASRALLAH

Classified By: Ambassador Michele J. Sison for reasons 1.4  
(b) and (d).

SUMMARY

1. (C) In a September 13 meeting with the Ambassador, Majority leader Saad Hariri reported on his successful effort to broker a reconciliation between opposing groups in Tripoli and his trip to the Bekaa Valley, noting that his efforts would continue in other areas of Lebanon. He warned that instead of worrying about Sunni extremism in Tripoli, the west should focus its attention on the need for implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1701, which would stem the flow of arms to extremists of all confessions. He suspected that Syria was using indirect negotiations with Israel as a means of delaying the implementation of the arms embargo contained in the resolution, and that Israel was using the indirect talks to delay peace with the Palestinians. He worried that the Special Tribunal for Lebanon was being overcome by international events. Hariri was pleased that the cabinet approved his preferred choice for Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) Commander, Jean Kahwagi, and he praised the new LAF Director of Military Intelligence (G-2).

2. (C) Hariri brought up the rumor of a possible meeting between himself and Hizballah Secretary General Hassan Nasrallah, and said that he would "probably want to do it." He said he was against expansion of the participation or agenda for the National Dialogue (to be launched by President Sleiman on September 16). He assured the Ambassador that, if necessary, he would impose unity on the March 14 alliance in advance of the 2009 parliamentary elections. He thought the elections might be delayed for technical reasons, but said Hizballah would not try to disrupt the elections with violence out of respect for its Christian partner, Michel Aoun. He also praised President Bush and the USG for their strong support for Lebanon. End summary.

TRIPOLI RECONCILIATION JUST THE BEGINNING,  
BUT EVERYTHING DEPENDS ON 1701

3. (C) The Ambassador, accompanied by PolEconOff, met with majority leader Saad Hariri at his residence in Qoreitem on September 13. Hariri advisors Nader Hariri and Amal Mudallali also attended the meeting. The Ambassador offered her congratulations to Hariri on the reconciliation he had brokered between feuding Sunni and Alawite groups in Tripoli.

Hariri called the Tripoli meeting historic, saying that even after the civil war, when the Syrians were occupying Lebanon, there had never been a meeting among these groups. He noted that he had just returned from a visit to the Bekaa region, where he had a series of positive meetings with opposing groups there. He predicted reconciliation in the Bekaa, a region in which skirmishes have taken place frequently since May. He said his efforts would continue in other parts of the country, though he did not reveal his next destination. Amal Mudallali, who hails from the Bekaa, noted the enthusiastic welcome Saad had received from Future supporters in the Bekaa, particularly in Chtaura. Hariri joked that he would like to go even farther with this approach: "I will take Shebaa Farms this way. I could take people with me. A march for Shebaa? 100,000? Why not?"

¶4. (C) The Ambassador asked Hariri whether alliances were yet being formed among the key Sunni politicians in Tripoli in preparation for the 2009 parliamentary elections. Hariri replied it was too early to tell. "There are members of parliament, members of March 14, who are not acting responsibly in Tripoli," he said, in a veiled reference to March 14 MP Misbah al-Ahdab from Tripoli, who was conspicuously absent from the reconciliation proceedings.

¶5. (C) He then shifted his focus to Syria and former prime minister Omar Karame, whose recent visit to Syria and Iran illustrated the larger problem Hariri wanted to stress. "If we have any al-Qaida in Lebanon, it is coming from Syria," said Hariri. "The Salafists are not the problem; they are actually fighting al-Qaida, because they know if they let in

BEIRUT 00001349 002 OF 003

al-Qaida they are finished. Here is the message I want you to send to Washington: Before you talk about Tripoli, implement 1701." Hariri complained that the lack of implementation of the arms embargo mandated by UNSCR 1701, and the resulting flow of weapons to all the armed groups in Lebanon, was the primary cause of instability in the country. Syria needed to hear a clear message on border and other issues.

BOTH SYRIANS AND ISRAELIS STALLING FOR TIME  
-----

¶6. (C) The Ambassador asked what effect President Sleiman's trip to Damascus or recent efforts by French President Sarkozy to engage the Syrians might have on the border issues and arms flow from Syria. "Zero," replied Hariri. The French do not have bad intentions, he said. They were trying to turn the Syrians away from Hizballah, but history has shown that the Syrian regime will not budge. Hariri said the Syrians were stalling for time, while the Israelis were doing the same. He claimed that historically, when the U.S. has put pressure on the Israelis to solve the Palestinian issue, Israel has opened another venue: Syria. Hariri urged the U.S. to underscore with the Israelis the need to make peace with the Palestinians. He said Israeli-Palestinian peace would be the best way "to subdue the Iranians, the jihadists, bin Laden, everyone," though he acknowledged that "Israel has its own politics."

TRIBUNAL LOST IN THE SHUFFLE?  
-----

¶7. (C) Hariri expressed concern about a perceived lack of movement on the Special Tribunal for Lebanon. He said he was not as much concerned about UN Investigator Bellemare's progress on the investigation into his father's killing as he was about the Tribunal not receiving the high-level international attention it requires. "With so many problems on the international stage, this could slip," he said. He asked that the U.S. work with its European allies in support of the Tribunal, and said he would engage the Russians and the Gulf States on the issue. Ambassador reassured Hariri of the USG's continuing strong support for and interest in the

STL.

NO TO EXPANSION OF THE NATIONAL DIALOGUE

18. (C) Hariri said President Sleiman was right to have convened the National Dialogue as he did in order to silence the opposition, which was trying to expand the agenda and participants. Nonetheless, said Hariri, he expected that after the initial protocol of the first Dialogue session, the opposition would again try to push to expand the number of attendees and topics to be discussed. Hariri explained that the Dialogue had always included only elements represented in parliament, and that he did not think it appropriate to expand participation to others. "They can come and stand behind their MPs, but they should not sit at the table," he said. He also worried that expanding the agenda would "cripple" parliament, if all its issues were to be decided in the Dialogue.

19. (C) Hariri's aide and cousin Nader chimed in that the dynamic of the National Dialogue will be different now that President Sleiman is leading it instead of Speaker Nabih Berri, who convened and led the Dialogue when it last met in 2006. "That is why Nabih Berri hates this," said Saad Hariri. "His role is smaller."

MARCH 14 WILL REMAIN UNITED

10. (C) The Ambassador complimented Hariri on March 14's agreement on a unified message, decision on unified lists, and successful establishment of a secretariat, but asked for Hariri's reaction to a comment by fellow March 14 leader Walid Jumblatt, reported in the press, referring to Hariri's advisors as "a caravan of camels." Hariri was circumspect, saying he would talk to Jumblatt about it. Nonetheless, he said, "We will be united. Don't worry. Even if I have to..."

BEIRUT 00001349 003 OF 003

you fill in the blank." Hariri said the problem with March 14 was that its leaders "need to come down to earth. They think they can do anything." He said he would soon launch new (unspecified) initiatives on the ground, and hold another March 14 political convention in November to rally coalition members.

ELECTIONS MAY BE DELAYED,  
BUT HIZBALLAH WILL NOT INTERFERE

11. (C) Hariri said he thought the parliamentary elections might need to be postponed for logistical reasons. He believes that overseas voting for Lebanese citizens could not be done in time for spring 2009. Hariri downplayed the possibility that Hizballah might try to spark violence in certain areas to disrupt the elections. That would not happen, he said, since the only disputed districts would be Christian districts, and Hizballah would not want to hurt the interests of its Christian partner, Michel Aoun. Without prompting, Hariri brought up recent rumors in the press that he would soon meet with Hizballah SYG Hassan Nasrallah. He looked sheepishly at the Ambassador and said, "We are looking into it, and we will probably want to do it eventually."

SLEIMAN TO WASHINGTON

12. (S) Hariri said that he hoped President Bush would reaffirm to President Sleiman the United States' strong support for Lebanon, for the Special Tribunal, for the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) and Internal Security Forces (ISF). He said the President should express U.S concerns about Hizballah and the real threat of another war with Israel. Above all, noted Hariri, he hoped President Bush would announce some sort of assistance during Sleiman's visit

-- particularly military aid. Hariri looked suddenly pensive, and said, "What President Bush did for Lebanon was more than anyone else. His support for the Tribunal and for this government has been excellent. Sometimes we complain about the speed of policy or the clarity of the process, but the U.S.-Lebanon relationship has been very good."

#### VICTORY ON THE LAF APPOINTMENT

-----

¶13. (C) Hariri noted proudly that he had succeeded in convincing cabinet members to approve the appointment of General Jean Kahwagi as the new LAF commander. He alluded to his role in convincing other key decision makers that former LAF G-2 Georges Khoury would have been a poor choice as LAF Commander. The Ambassador remarked that she had not yet met the new LAF Director of Military Intelligence, BG Edmond Fadel, to which Hariri replied, "He is a good man. You will like him."

#### COMMENT

-----

¶14. (C) It seems clear from the way Hariri brought up his potential meeting with Nasrallah that he was giving us a heads up in advance of a meeting that could possibly already be in the works. We note that many in Lebanon seem to be rooting for such a meeting as a sign of political stability and a guarantee that confrontations like those that occurred in May 2008 will not be repeated. The business community in particular, after a record summer tourist season, is anxious to see signs that the current calm will continue (septel).

¶15. (C) Hariri was sincerely thankful for the support the U.S. has shown Lebanon since the assassination of his father in 2005. In contrast to his frequent complaints that the USG has not done enough, his comments praising U.S support were a welcome change. End comment.

SISON